

# Is There an Iron Age Levant?\*



**Bruce Routledge**  
University of Liverpool

## Resumen

Para quienes investigan la Edad del Hierro, una perspectiva levantina representa considerables desafíos y ventajas. La región se encuentra vagamente delimitada y son pocos los estudios que emplazan este contexto general en su centro. No obstante, una aproximación a la Edad del Hierro desde una perspectiva levantina amplia representa una ventaja en tanto que requiere la consideración de patrones globales así como de la diversidad local de manera simultánea. La tensión entre la “imagen global” y el detalle local complica y desafía a la vez a las narrativas simples sobre el cambio histórico. Dos casos en los que una perspectiva levantina cambia cómo comprendemos la Edad del Hierro son: 1) la interpretación de la cerámica local de estilo egeo en relación con los Pueblos del Mar, y 2) la forma y la formación de los reinos de la Edad del Hierro.

### *Palabras clave*

*Levante  
Edad del Hierro  
Pueblos del Mar  
Formación estatal*

## Abstract

For students of the Iron Age a Levantine perspective presents significant challenges and rewards. The region is vaguely bounded and there are relatively few studies that place this larger context at their heart. Yet, approaching the Iron Age from a Levant-wide perspective is rewarding insofar as it requires us to consider global patterns and local diversity simultaneously. The tension between the ‘big picture’ and local detail complicates and challenges easy narratives of historical change. Two cases where a Levantine perspective changes how we view the Iron

### *Keywords*

*Levant  
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\* This article was originally written in 2010 for an edited volume that never went to press. I have updated the references, and some content, but the core arguments remain unchanged. In particular, I have not rethought my arguments in light of the intervening events in Syria. As a result, my hopes for a broader Levantine perspective may seem naïvely optimistic. Considering the alternatives, I am happy to embrace this label. I want to thank Emanuel Pfoh for suggesting I submit the paper to *RIHAO*.

Age are 1) the interpretation of local Aegean style pottery in relation to the Sea Peoples, and 2) the form and formation of Iron Age kingdoms.

Let us begin by admitting that the Levant is a problematic term. On one hand, its etymology suggests a narrowly European orientation that is difficult to defend in the Twenty-First Century. After all, if the Levant is whatever lies on the eastern horizon, then England is Ireland's Levant, just as the Middle East is China's Middle West. On the other hand, this same solar orientation is mirrored in the Arabic distinction between the *Mashriq* ("place of sunrise", which includes the Eastern Mediterranean) and the *Maghrib* ("place of sunset", primarily North Africa), suggesting a Mediterranean history older and more complex than that allowed by simple post-colonial critiques.

Over time, the Levant has shrunk from being everything Mediterranean east of Venice to referring specifically to those lands bordering the Mediterranean's eastern shore. In many ways, this more limited territorial reference is better represented by the designation *Bilad ash-Sham* ("Land of Damascus"), attested already under the Umayyad Caliphate, where it was divided into the districts of Damascus, Homs, Qinnasrin (incorporating Aleppo), Palestine and Jordan. These sub-divisions remain useful even today, although, as is so often the case, it is difficult to know what to do with the Lebanon. Unfortunately, *Bilad ash-Sham* has so little currency amongst non-Arabic speakers that its focus on Damascus is likely to be misunderstood and its chances for wider propagation rather limited. "Western Asia", favoured of late by many British archaeologists seeking to escape the Eurocentrism of the term "Near East", would seem to defy further specification. After all, would anyone really propose "south-western Western Asia" as a workable substitute for the Levant? It seems that we are stuck with that problematic term the Levant; but to what exactly does this term refer?

The Levant is more than just a problematic term. It also entails certain problems of geographical definition. It is true that one can point to a series of physical features running west to east and shared, more or less, from north to south along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. These are 1) the coastline and adjacent plain, 2) the western highlands bordering the rift valley, 3) the trough of the rift itself with its three major rivers (the Orontes, Litani and Jordan), 4) the eastern upland transition to steppe, and 5) the Syrian Desert. Across this zone agriculture is, with important exceptions, dependant on rainfall and closely integrated with pastoralism of variable degrees of mobility. Also, highland / lowland, coastal / inland, and semi-arid / arid contrasts play an important structuring role in economic, social and cultural relations.

Once stated, however, one immediately sees the problems with these generalisations. Mt. Lebanon is of an altogether different order of magnitude than Mt. Moriah. Large-scale features, like the Akkar Plain, the Hauran or the Dead Sea basin, are more than just local anomalies. Furthermore, the limits of the Levant are rather unclear if we wish to use this entity to delimit meaningful research questions. For example, if we are interested in the Iron Age, as I am in this paper, does it make sense to exclude Cilicia, Gaziantep, the Upper Euphrates or the

Sinai, if we are including the Northern Orontes valley or the Negev? Yet, if one includes these outer regions within the Levant why stop there, what about the Jazirah, the Konya Plain or Cyprus?

One has trouble defining the Levant as a region because as a region it has two outstanding features: the Levant is locally diverse and globally interconnected. At almost any point in the Levant one is within a day's journey of land forms, precipitation rates or soil profiles markedly different from where one is standing. At the same time, proximity to the Mediterranean, to land routes shaped by the availability of water, and to perpetual centres of political power in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Anatolia, means that the Levant is everywhere tied into large-scale developments in trade and geo-politics.

Given these divergent characteristics, does it actually make sense to speak of the archaeology of the Iron Age Levant? If one were to judge the viability of a field of study by the availability of undergraduate textbooks, then one would have to say that there was virtually no archaeology of the Iron Age Levant, at least not in the English-speaking world. At present, *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant, c.8000-332 BCE* stands alone in presenting the archaeology of the Levant as a whole (Steiner and Killebrew, 2014). In contrast, there are multiple textbooks on the archaeology of Israel (E.g. Ben-Tor, 1992), the Holy Land (e.g. Levy, 1995), and the Land of the Bible (E.g. Mazar, 1990), not to mention a couple on the archaeology of Palestine (E.g. Rast, 1992) and the archaeology of Jordan (E.g. Adams, 2008) and one on the archaeology of Syria (Akkermans and Schwartz, 2003). An up-to-date synthesis of the archaeology of the Lebanon has yet to appear, although books on Lebanon's favourite sons and daughters, the Phoenicians, can be found in abundance (E.g. Markoe, 2000; Woolmer, 2017).

This fragmentation of textbooks suggests that pedagogically, and perhaps also intellectually, archaeologists working immediately east of the Mediterranean have found the most appropriate unit of analysis to be something other than the Levant. I doubt that anyone would be surprised if I suggested that this fragmentation is rooted as much in the history and politics of scholarship, as it is in the intrinsic qualities of the material being studied (see also Porter, 2016). All archaeology is local, in the sense that interpretation rests on specific sequences and sets of material culture that come from specific places. However, the scope of that locality will shift with the questions being asked, and in the case of the Levant this cannot be said to always settle naturally on such common divisions as the Northern and Southern Levant, Phoenicia and inland Syria, or Palestine and Transjordan. Rather, these divisions owe a good deal to 1) the history of biblically focused research that has isolated and prioritised Palestine in relation to the rest of the Levant, leading to an inward focus on issues of biblical interpretation. This has been paired with an anti-biblical orientation in which scholars have actively avoided questions and materials that might be associated with the Hebrew Bible; 2) a colonial history in which the region was divided into distinct spheres of interest (primarily the British and French mandates, but also the German-Ottoman alliance) in which distinct traditions of archaeological research developed; 3) the on-going Arab-Israeli conflict, where on one hand a Zionist agenda has placed an unduly narrow emphasis on the history of the

Jewish people in Palestine and on the other, an anti-Zionist agenda in which efforts to avoid any association with Israel have created significant barriers to pan-regional communication and scholarship; 4) the embedding of archaeology into multiple modern states as an issue of national patrimony and of administrative and legislative infra-structure, such that archaeological research is now experienced as “national” in many practical ways.

Nowhere is the impact of this divided history more evident than in the archaeology of the Iron Age. As the period in which much of the Hebrew Bible is set, the archaeology of the Iron Age Levant has long been trapped in an extended debate whose priorities are defined by both the narrative structure of the Bible and the place of that narrative in various modern identities. I should note that this includes not only Jewish and Christian religious identities, or Israeli national identities, but also those secular identities, which in being defined largely by the negation of biblical historicity fail to escape the terms of these debates. Furthermore, in contrast to both earlier and later periods, the Iron Age presents us with historical narratives in which small kingdoms and identity groups, rather than cities or empires, can be embedded as collective actors in terms that are at least partly familiar to us as citizens of modern nation-states.

In practical terms, these circumstances have led to the regional fragmentation noted above, but also to an unusual emphasis across the Levant on collective actors defined in linguistic, ethnic or religious terms. Such actors are eligible to be subjects of their own primordial histories along the lines of those histories of the Israel that characterise biblically oriented approaches. Note, for example, how seldom scholars seem bothered by the fact that “Phoenician” only exists as a collective term in Greek and has no direct equivalent in what scholars call the Phoenician language. In scholarship on the Iron Age Levant it seems that Phoenicians, Aramaeans, Moabites and Neo-Hittites all line-up to take their place in an ethno-political history modelled in many ways on the well-known story of Israel. This parochial world defined by ethno-linguistic entities shapes and limits the questions that are asked of the Iron Age archaeological record in the Levant.

It is in this context that I believe that an archaeology of the Levant has an important role to play, not least for the study of the Iron Age (cf. Porter, 2016). The key is to remember the two characteristics of the Levant as a region; its local diversity and global interconnectedness. Looking to the Levant as a whole immediately raises large-scale issues of both structure and change. It forces us to think about the global context of our archaeological evidence, and to account for a wide range of evidence in our interpretations. At the same time, the local diversity of the Levant breaks down, or at least challenges, any easy generalisations we might make with regards to that global context. Hence, the value of an archaeology of the Levant is not simply that it provides a more balanced picture of the Iron Age than our current balkanized view. Rather, its value lies in the fact that an archaeology of the Levant, by its very nature, requires us to tack back and forth between global similarities and local differences; that is to say, between big pictures and specific details. This, of course, is the essence of good archaeological interpretation. It also has the political advantage of requiring us to re-examine our fixed points and grand narratives, and to follow a relatively untrodden path in a region where paths are often heavily worn, divided and even fortified.

Some examples of the issues raised by an archaeology of the Levant will be illustrated in the remainder of this paper by looking briefly (and superficially) at two “global” Iron Age events, each with distinct local manifestations. These are 1) Local Aegean style pottery and the “Sea Peoples”; and 2) the formation of small kingdoms.

### Local Aegean Style Pottery and “Sea Peoples”

One of the more notable phenomena marking the transition from the Bronze to Iron Age is the appearance in Cyprus, Cilicia and along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean of locally produced versions of Late Helladic IIIC pottery (henceforth local Aegean style pottery). Since F.B. Welch first noted the affinities of form and decoration between, what is now called, “Philistine” bichrome pottery and various forms of Mycenaean pottery, scholars have shifted between local and regional contexts in their attempts to weave an explanatory narrative out of an intriguing archaeological pattern (Welch, 1899/1900).

Through the work of scholars such as R.A.S. Macalister this local Aegean style pottery was linked to the “Sea Peoples” in the Year 8 inscriptions of Ramses III, and through the *Peleset* of these inscriptions also to the Philistines of the Hebrew Bible (Macalister, 1914). Destructions at the end of the Late Bronze Age across the Levant were credited to this migrating hoard, as scholars elaborated on the claims of Ramses III’s inscriptions (E.g. Albright, 1966). However, a growing disparity in the availability of evidence soon shifted the focus of synthesis and interpretation to local regions.

### *The Migration Model*

In the case of Philistia, the “Sea Peoples Invasion” seemed to hold up well in light of further empirical investigation. Two phases of “Philistine” pottery were distinguished, with the earlier (monochrome) being recognisably part of the Late Helladic IIIC tradition, yet also locally made and concentrated at sites identified in the Bible as part of the Philistine Pentapolis. Additionally, evidence for other material culture with Aegean, or at least Eastern Mediterranean, affinities began to be noted at early Iron Age sites in Philistia, including figurines, notched scapula, iron-knives, unperforated cylindrical loom weights, “bathtubs” and constructed hearths (see Dothan, 1982; Killebrew, 2005). Furthermore, analysis of faunal remains from these same sites showed that pigs played a significant role in the animal economy in marked contrast to contemporary sites immediately east of Philistia in Palestine (Hesse, 1990). Hence, in Philistia, local Aegean style pottery seemed to provide a strong and relatively unambiguous indicator of the mass migration of an ethnic group called the Philistines originating somewhere in the Aegean. While there were disagreements over the sequence and chronology of this migration, as well as attempts to complicate our understanding of the social composition and dynamics of the migrating group (Bunimovitz and Yasur-Landau, 1996; Sweeney and Yasur-Landau, 1999), the overall migration paradigm was stated rather strongly in several syntheses in the 1990s (E.g. Stager, 1995; Oren, 2000) and widely accepted within scholarship.

### *The Mercantile Model*

Contemporary developments in the archaeology of Cyprus proceeded somewhat differently. Here too the introduction of local Aegean style pottery (termed White Painted Wheelmade III Ware) was seen to herald the arrival of Aegean migrants to the island, co-terminous with the destructions dated to the transition from Late Cypriot IIC to Late Cypriot III (Karageorghis, 2000). However, strong continuity in material culture between LCIIC and LCIIIA, the fact that local Aegean style pottery was not a complete assemblage but used primarily for serving and eating vessels, and evidence that this pottery and related material culture (e.g. hearths, “bath tubs”, ashlar masonry) began to be produced in Cyprus before the destructions at the end of LCIIC, led some scholars to question the migration paradigm (E.g. Kling, 1989; Sherratt, 1992; see also Iacovou, 2013). Perhaps best known of these sceptics was Susan Sherratt, who argued that local Aegean style pottery was an economic, rather than ethnic, phenomenon. For Sherratt, local Aegean style pottery represented a dispersal of centres of production as coastal communities once involved in the transshipment of Mycenaean pottery from the Aegean now produced their own local versions (Sherratt, 1999; 1998).

Sherratt’s argument could never remain simply an explanation for Cyprus, as she herself understood (E.g. Sherratt, 1998). Hence, her mercantile alternative to the migration paradigm was immediately taken up and debated in relation to local Mycenaean pottery in the Levant, especially in Philistia (Bauer, 1998; Barako, 2000). This wider regional perspective highlighted several empirical weaknesses in Sherratt’s import substitution model. First, evidence from Ugarit does not support the sharp demarcation between palatial and private trade posited as a precondition for the formation of autonomous specialists in sea trade who prospered with the fall of the LB palatial system (Routledge and McGeough, 2009).

Second, the imported Mycenaean pottery of the Late Bronze Age and the local Aegean style pottery of the Iron Age in the Southern Levant each attest a limited, but somewhat different, range of forms. In the Late Bronze Age, preference is for closed forms, such as stirrup jars, pyxides and alabaster, which were probably used to transport aromatics and specialty oils (see Leonard, 1994). In the early Iron Age, local Mycenaean pottery is more commonly found in open forms such as deep bowls/skyphoi (see Dothan and Zuckerman, 2004; Gilboa, 2005). Hence one assemblage (i.e. local Aegean style pottery) is not a direct replacement for the other (imported Mycenaean pottery).

Finally, the mercantile model does not account for changes in aspects of material culture besides pottery, such as loom weights, figurines, hearths and diet, unless one posits the migration of foreign potters or merchants, in which case we are brought back to the migration model in a different form.

### *The Levantine Context*

Despite these problems, Sherratt’s mercantile model did have the virtue of reorienting research on local Aegean style pottery back to a larger regional



context, a kind of maximal Levant that incorporates Cyprus and Cilicia. As noted, the challenge and advantage of a Levantine perspective is that we are forced to address both global interconnections and local variability, and the case of local Aegean style pottery is no exception. In particular, recognizing on-going connections between the Levant and Cyprus, as well as the diversity of how and when local Aegean style pottery appears in the archaeological record across the Levant has, in Ayelet Gilboa's terms, "fragmented" the Sea Peoples, undermining simple, or singular, versions of the migration model (Gilboa, 2006-2007).

First, Sherratt's stress on the importance of Cyprus is certainly correct. On one hand, it has long been recognised that some stylistic features of local Aegean style pottery developed in parallel in both Philistia and Cyprus during the early Iron Age (Gilboa, 2005; Killebrew, 2008; Mountjoy, 2010, 2013, 2017), and the same appears to be the case for the parts of the Northern Levant as well (E.g. Janeway, 2017). On the other hand, while physical evidence for contact with Cyprus declines in the early Iron Age it does not disappear as was once thought to be the case. Small quantities of 'Derivative' / 'Simple Style' Mycenaean vessels (esp. stirrup jars), as well as non-local LHIIIC pottery have been excavated in transitional Late Bronze to the Iron Age contexts at sites in the Southern Levant (Killebrew, 2008; Mountjoy, 2017; Sherratt and Mazar, 2013; Stockhammer, 2017). Some of this pottery may have been made in the Levant but much of it appears to have been imported from Cyprus (E.g. Cohen-Weinberger, 2013; D'Agata et al., 2005; Mountjoy and Mommsen, 2015). Even within Philistia proper very small quantities of Aegean style pottery made in Cyprus have been identified late in the so-called "Monochrome" or "Philistine 1" phase at Ashkelon (Master et al., 2015).

At Tarsus in Cilicia, INAA analysis has shown that the LHIIIC style pottery was made both locally and in Cyprus (Mommsen et al., 2011). In the Northern Levant, small quantities of 'Simple Style' Mycenaean pottery originating in Cyprus has been identified alongside local Aegean style pottery at Tell Kazel, using both petrography and INAA (Badre et al., 2005). In the earliest Iron Age phase at Tell Tayinat (Field Phase 6), small numbers of Cypriot imports have also been identified by petrography (Janeway, 2017: 46, 115). At Tayinat it is also clear that the local Aegean style pottery is quite late in the sequence of LHIIIC pottery (LHIIIC Middle/ Late), including Granary Style, Wavy Line and Banded/Monochrome decoration usually associated with LCIIIB contexts on Cyprus (Janeway, 2017). Hence, low-level contact with Cyprus continues to be attested into the 11th Century. Something similar has been suggested for Tel Dor, where there appears to be an occupational gap in the first half of the 12th Century, followed by local Aegean style pottery that fits well with LCIIIB developments on Cyprus (Gilboa, 2005, 2006-2007; Sharon and Gilboa, 2013). Given that Cypriot exports in the Northern Levant become prominent again in the Cypro-Geometric I period (late 11th/10th century) there is no break in Cypriot contact with the Levant in the early Iron Age.

The late appearance of local Aegean-style pottery at Tell Tayinat is also evident at other sites in the 'Amuq, such as Chatal Höyük (Pucci, 2013). This highlights another key point that emerges from a wider Levantine perspective. In the

Northern Levant and Cilicia we can point to at least three different sorts of sequences of local Aegean style pottery. Whereas local Aegean style pottery at the 'Amuq sites is stylistically late, suggesting a late 12th/ 11th century introduction, sites such as Ras Ibn Hani (Piéd, 2006-2007, 2011) and Tarsus (see Lehmann, 2017, with references) show a stratigraphic succession of early and late styles of LHIIIC in a sequence that must span the entire 12th century. Tell Afis shows a similar developmental sequence, with stylistically early (Antithetical Spiral decoration) local Aegean style pottery, followed by much larger amounts decorated in LHIIIC Middle/Late styles (Wavy Line, Monochrome) (Venturi, 2000, 2007, 2010). Interestingly, visual examination of wares has led the excavators to suggest that this pottery was imported into the middle Orontes Valley from coastal Syria or the 'Amuq. In contrast, at sites such as Tell Kazel and Tell Tweini only LHIIIC Early styles were found. This suggests that the local production of Aegean style pottery in Cilicia and the Northern Levant did not begin all at once (see also Pedrazzi and Venturi, 2011).

Similarly, the introduction of local Aegean style pottery has a variable relationship to the destruction levels marking the end of the Late Bronze Age at many sites. At Tell Miqne-Ekron Field 1, we find the 'classic' pattern with the Late Bronze Age settlement burned in Stratum IX and reoccupied in Stratum VIII before local Aegean style pottery appears suddenly in large quantities in Stratum VII (see Killebrew, 2008: 59-65). At Tell Kazel, however, local Aegean style pottery appears in Area II (North-Eastern) Level 6 Final and Area IV Level 5 Upper Floor, after an apparent abandonment of the Late Bronze Age city but prior to the evidence for violent destruction that marks the transition from Levels 6 to 5 in Area II and 5 to 4-3 in Area IV (Badre, 2006; Jung, 2007).<sup>1</sup>

1. It should be noted that elsewhere in Area II (Southern) there does not seem to be a "squatters" phase prior to destruction layer and the local Aegean style pottery appears after the destruction (Chiti and Pedrazzi, 2014).

If we put these observations together, it appears that local Aegean style pottery represents processes that played out over as much as a century rather than representing a singular historical event, such as the Year 8 "invasions" of Ramses III (see also Lehmann, 2013: 316-328). Looking at Cyprus and the Levant, direct low-level contact was continuous, with stylistic developments in particular suggesting not migrants with a homeland and a destination but rather on-going interaction.

A Levantine perspective raises other questions regarding the standard migration model. Excavations at Tel Qasile (Mazar, 1985: 43-44) in the 1970s uncovered very small quantities Handmade Burnished Ware (HBW), a utilitarian ware found in Late Bronze-Iron Age transitional contexts in Greece (and to a lesser extent in Crete, Anatolia and Cyprus). These finds remained unique in the Levant until the renewal of excavation at coastal sites in the north. HBW is now known from Tell Kazel (Capet, 2006-2007; Boileau et al., 2010; Jung, 2017); Tell Arqa (Charaf, 2011) and Beirut (Badre, 1998). In each case the HBW appears to be locally made, much like the local Aegean style pottery.

Interestingly, in the Aegean HBW is part of a set of material culture appearing during the Late Bronze / Iron Age transition that is often been seen as evidence for foreign migration into the Aegean, particularly from either Southern Italy or the Balkans (Jung, 2017; Lis, 2009). Lorenz Rahmstorf has shown that HBW frequently occurs with cylindrical loom weights in Aegean and Cypriot contexts



(Rahmstorf, 2011). In the Levant, cylindrical loom-weights play a significant role in migration arguments because, unlike ceramic vessels, they are held to be Aegean-style objects that lack a role in transport and consumption that might lead to their conscious imitation. However, in a series of publications Rahmstorf showed that, much as in the Levant, these loom weights appear as a novel feature of 12th Century contexts in the Aegean, with 13th Century appearances being limited to Crete, Anatolia and indeed Beth Shean in Palestine (Rahmstorf, 2003, 2005).

We could, as some do, look for new homelands for all or part of the Sea Peoples, perhaps in Italy (Jung, 2017) or Western Anatolia (Ben-Dor Evian, 2017). However, what is striking about the co-occurrence of HBW with cylindrical loom weights and local Aegean style pottery is the impression one gets of a simultaneous Eastern Mediterranean phenomenon rather than a sequential West to East diffusion.

### Fragmenting the Sea Peoples

At present, the interpretation of local Aegean style pottery in the Levant is in a rather interesting state of flux. On one hand, scholars are arguing for the necessity of interpreting the significance of this pottery locally on a site by site basis (E.g. Gilboa, 2006-2007; Piéd, 2006-2007; Núñez, 2017). On the other hand, the necessity of local analysis has been brought home primarily as a result of the diversity now evident in an expanded Levant-wide data set. This larger Levantine perspective has, in fact, had an interesting impact even within the apparently most coherent of sub-regions – Philistia. It is now common to discount a mass migration (E.g. Middleton, 2015). Instead, scholars speak of both the Philistine and Sea-Peoples phenomena as the outcome of a complex process of multiple small-scale migrations combined with the dispersal of specific sets of Aegean material culture traditions and their hybridisation with local Levantine and Cypriot traditions (E.g. Killebrew, 2008; Maeir et al., 2013; Yasur-Landau, 2010). Scholars have even begun to argue for the historical importance of notable differences between Philistine settlements in terms of material cultural and archaeological sequences (Ben-Shlomo, 2006-2007; Maeir et al., 2013). Some scholars have used diversity as the primary criteria for defining the Sea Peoples, suggesting that pirates and piracy may provide a model for the kind of mobile, inter-cultural, sea-based communities that could produce the *mélange* of Eastern Mediterranean cultural traits said to characterise the material culture of the Sea Peoples (Jung, 2009; Hitchcock and Maeir, 2014, 2016). All of this represents a marked change in our understanding of the Philistines when compared to the syntheses of the 1990s.

An even bigger change has recently been proposed by J.D. Hawkins as the result of both new readings, and new examples, of Neo-Hittite inscriptions in and around Tell Tayinat and Aleppo (Hawkins, 2009, 2011). Hawkins has proposed that the early Neo-Hittite name of the Iron Age kingdom centred on Tell Tayinat should be read as *Palastini*, rather than *Wadastani* or *Padastani*, as had formerly been thought (Hawkins, 2009: 171). He also argues that, based

on extant inscriptions, this kingdom develops over the course of the 11th-10th century, being much larger and earlier than previously thought, with nominal authority stretching from the 'Amuq to Aleppo, 'Ain Dara and even Hama (Dinçol et al., 2015, Hawkins, 2011). Finally, in noting the etymological link between *Palastini* and the *Peleset* of Ramses III's inscriptions, Hawkins also points to a tradition in two later Iron Age inscriptions (from Karatepe and Çineköy) which suggests that the royal house of Adana (in the land of Que/Hiyawa in Cilicia) claimed descent from Mopsos, a hero appearing in a variety of ancient Greek literary traditions regarding Western Anatolia and Cilicia (Hawkins, 2009: 166; see Bryce, 2016; Gander, 2012; and Yakubovich, 2015, for further discussion). For Hawkins, this shows an historical memory alive in the Iron Age that recognised the movement of Aegean (or Western Anatolian) migrants into the southern appanage kingdoms of the Hittite Empire (e.g. Tarhuntassas), including perhaps *Palastini* or its immediate predecessor *Mukish*. These southern appanage kingdoms may have survived the collapse of the Hittite Empire in some form and provided the foundations for Neo-Hittite culture in the Iron Age. When combined with the evidence for local Aegean style pottery at Tayinat and elsewhere in the 'Amuq, Hawkins is willing to suggest a connection between the kingdom of *Palastini* and the Philistines.

Prof. Hawkins' specific historical conclusions are highly speculative and have elicited both support (Emanuel, 2015; Harrison, 2009a, 2009b, 2014; Weeden, 2013, 2015), and some scepticism (Gander, 2012; Meijer, 2017; Singer, 2012; Younger, 2016: 127-135) amongst scholars. They have also led to unusual and unexpected possibilities. For example, both Dan'el Kahn and Shirly Ben-Dor Evian have attempted to relocate Ramses III's encounters with the Sea Peoples, and their initial settlement, to the Northern Levant, with these events followed by a second migration south to Palestine (Kahn, 2011; Ben-Dor Evian, 2017). This position rightly highlights problems with traditional interpretations of the Medinet Habu and Papyrus Harris texts vis-à-vis their literal content. This position is also in keeping with the "Low Chronology" view that local Aegean style pottery does not appear in Philistia until after c. 1140 BCE. However, the relative lateness of both the local Aegean style pottery at Tell Tayinat and the even later kingdom of *Palastini* creates another problem that is not resolved by moving Ramses III's battles to the north. Even under the Low Chronology of the Southern Levant, the resettlement of Tell Tayinat (and other Amuq sites) would be contemporary with, or later than (on LHIIIC stylistic grounds), the initial appearance of local Aegean style pottery in Philistia. In other words, if one accepts that Ramses III's *Peleset* gave birth to both the biblical Philistines and the Neo-Hittite kingdom of *Palastini* then either the branches of this 'family' diverged along radically different trajectories very early on, or the term *Peleset* did not have the coherent ethnic referent that has so often been presumed. In either case, the patchwork of texts, images and archaeology that constitutes the traditional migration model is no longer quite so coherent and seamless.

Even without Prof. Hawkins' speculative reconstruction, taken as a whole, the Levantine archaeological record suggests that insofar as the phenomenon of local Aegean style pottery involved the movement of people, this movement was more extended, partial, discontinuous and variable than previously thought. In other words, it seems unlikely that the "Philistines" arrived on the southern

coast of Palestine with a coherent group identity in hand. Indeed, it seems more likely that *Peleset* was a term in circulation in the Eastern Mediterranean at the end of the Late Bronze Age that, in being applicable to people on the move between the Aegean, Cyprus, Cilicia and the Levant, could be appropriated for more specific cultural and political ends as group identities developed in the specific historical circumstances of the early Iron Age Southern Levant (cf. Bauer, 2014). Whatever the case, using the Levant (here inclusive of Cyprus and Cilicia) as a frame of reference within which to account for local diversity in the face of “global” processes has significantly changed the way that scholars have come to interpret local Aegean pottery over the past fifteen years.

### The Formation of Iron Age Kingdoms

It is not an exaggeration to say that the formation of the kingdom of Israel is the centre piece of the Hebrew Bible in which the fulfillment YHWH’s promise is given concrete form; what comes before is a preamble, what comes after is a long and painful object lesson in the virtues of obedience. Many strands within Biblical Archaeology continue to repeat and reify these same interests and perspectives by focusing narrowly on the formation of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Yet, unless one is satisfied with divine selection as a historical explanation, the wide-spread emergence of many other kingdoms in the same time frame makes a broader Levantine perspective on Iron Age state-formation necessary as well as desirable.

In the centuries between ca. 1150 and 850 BCE, across a broad swathe of the ancient Near East, from the southern Levant and Cilicia to the Jazirah, small and mid-sized kingdoms emerge in the aftermath of Late Bronze Age empires, only to be pressurized once again by the re-emergence of Assyria. The apparent contrast between the organizing principles of Late Bronze Age polities (often described as “city-states”) and at least some of the new Iron Age polities (sometimes described as “national” states) has led many scholars to characterize Iron Age state formation as a new development within the history of the ancient Near East. At the same time, these “new” polities present us with an interpretive problem in that the similarities and differences in their historical development, organizing principles and ethno-linguistic composition both demand and defy comparison.

In some areas the transition from Late Bronze to Iron Age is virtually instantaneous, with coastal kingdoms like Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos apparently maintaining cultural and dynastic continuity across the Late Bronze—Iron Age divide. Others experience a transition, but this occurs very early and constitutes more of a change in status than in nature. The Neo-Hittite kingdom of Melid (Malatya/ Arslan Tepe) is an example of this, with inscriptional evidence suggesting genealogical continuity between the ruling dynasty of this kingdom and the ancillary line of the Hittite royal family that ruled in Karkamish as a regional administrative capital during the Late Bronze Age (see Hawkins, 1995). Although reused and reconstructed in the late 8th Century BCE, the Iron Age royal inscriptions and reliefs of the Lion Gate at Arslan Tepe can be

connected to a fortification system destroyed at end of the 11th Century BCE and constructed at least as early as the late 12th Century BCE, suggesting an immediate and relatively smooth transition from Hittite Imperial to local dynastic rule (Manuelli and Mori, 2016). In other cases, the transition is much more disruptive and drawn out, punctuated by large-scale shifts in settlement, and the emergence of new collective identities. This is best known in the case of Israel and Judah, but characterizes other polities as well, especially those Aramaean kingdoms associated with newly founded or refounded settlements (Mazzoni, 1994, 1995; Sader, 2000).

### ***Structural Diversity***

Frustratingly, Iron Age kingdoms would appear to have no set governmental structure defining over what a king ruled. In Assyrian and indigenous royal inscriptions, contemporary Iron Age kingdoms can be defined as: 1) primate cities with a territory, like Karkamish; 2) a territory distinguished in name from its capital city, as in the case of Unqi/Patina (the later names for *Palastini*) vis-à-vis Kunulua; 3) a group of people, such as “the Sons of Ammon”; 4) a temporary coalition of kings such as the one that opposed Zakkur in the Zakkur inscription; 5) a dual entity such as Zakkur’s kingdom of Hamath and Lu’ash; or 6) one kingdom in which primary rulers incorporated secondary rulers – as appears to be the case for the kingdom of Adana as reflected in the Karatepe inscription and perhaps also Kummuh as reflected in Neo-Assyrian annals.

Similarly, we see a range of collective terms used to refer to these polities, phrases such as “Land of X”, “City of X”, “House of (Dynastic Founder)”, “House of (Eponymous Ancestor)”, and “Sons of (Dynast/ Ancestor)” are all used, and in many cases more than one is used to refer to the same polity (E.g. see Routledge, 2004: 125, Table 6.1). One also finds a variety of modes of self-legitimation, such as the continued use of Hittite royal titles; the assertion of legitimate royal ancestry; the assertion that one had outperformed ones ancestors; the assertion that one was a “self-made” man without royal ancestors, or that one had been picked out and placed on the throne by a deity or more powerful ruler (Routledge, 2004: 156-159).

This structural diversity makes it rather difficult to explain the “global” phenomenon of Iron Age state-formation by means of universal categories, such as “the State”. In particular, the use of the kinship and genealogical terms in the organization and representation of Iron Age kingdoms contradicts long-standing modes of social analysis that view kinship and kingship as distinct, even opposed, principles of social integration (E.g. Maine, 1999 [1861]). Instead, scholars have tended to develop what might be called local typologies as a means of accounting for the diversity of Iron Age kingdoms in the Levant, frequently justified by appeals to the “secondary” nature of Levantine state-formation (following Price, 1978).

### ***Local Models***

The most common attempt to impose order on the complexity of the situation is by dividing the Iron Age Levant into ethno-linguistic groups (E.g. Garr, 1985;

Lipiński, 2000); usually Neo-Hittites (Luwian), Arameans, Phoenicians, linguistically inter-related southern groups (Israel, Judah, Ammon, Moab, and Edom) and linguistically uncertain groups such as the Philistines. Unfortunately, these ethno-linguistic divisions do not correspond neatly and completely with the distribution of other cultural features and hence do not serve to “explain” either the similarity or diversity to be found amongst Iron Age kingdoms. It is notable that, for example, at both Hama and Til Barsip rulers using Aramaic succeed those using Luwian (Sader, 1987; Bunnens, 1995; Dalley, 2000). At Zinçirli, rulers with Hittite names left Aramaic and Phoenician inscriptions (Tropper, 1993), while throughout south-eastern Anatolia one finds a number of bilingual inscriptions written in Luwian and Phoenician (see Hawkins, 2000).

More social scientifically oriented scholars have tried to devise sub-categories of “the State” that might serve to both provide a structural explanation for the distinct nature of Iron Age kingdoms and provide a basis for comparing these kingdoms cross-culturally. Several such sub-categories have been proposed, with the primary division being between those who emphasize social structure and corporate integration, and hence speak of “tribal states” (LaBianca and Younker, 1995; Bienkowski and van der Steen, 2001) or “ethnic states” (Joffe, 2002; Liverani, 2002), and those who emphasize shared mentalities and dyadic relations between households and hence speak of “patrimonial states” (Master, 2001; Stager, 2003; Schloen, 2001) or “patronage societies” (Lemche, 1995, 1996; Pfoh, 2009a: 87-112).

### ***Ethnic and tribal states***

The basic argument for the first position was laid out already by Georgio Buccellati in his analysis of political institutions in ancient Syria (by which he meant all of the Levant) (1967). Buccellati organizes this analysis around a distinction between territorial states and national states. For Buccellati, the key contrast was not between city-states and territorial states as the former was effectively a sub-class of the latter in the sense that it was territorially defined (Buccellati, 1967: 14). Rather, the key distinction was between states whose “associative bond” was determined by common residence in a territory (territorial states) versus those whose bond was determined through identification as a common people (national states) (Buccellati, 1967: 13-15, 21-22). For Buccellati, in the specific case of ancient Israel, the common identity of national states was expressed through kinship and genealogy, reflecting the fact that such states developed directly from nomadic tribal leagues (1967: 83-107). More to the point, Buccellati argues that whatever one might think of the historicity of Israel’s “nomadic prehistory”, the Israelites themselves shared a national story of descent from a common ancestor (1967: 95-97).

While not stating that national states were a uniquely Iron Age phenomenon, Buccellati does credit their development to the movement of nomadic tribes in the later second millennium BCE (Buccellati, 1967: 83-91). Mario Liverani goes further, arguing that the transition from the Bronze to Iron Age sees a significant innovation in the modes of political association in the Near East (Liverani, 2002). Liverani argues that the tripartite division of political formations in the Late Bronze Age (“great kings”, “little kings”, and “non-state



tribes”) is transformed into a division between “regional states” (e.g. Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Elam), “city-states” (Phoenicia, Philistia, Neo-Hittites), and “ethnic-states” (e.g. Israel, Moab, Ammon) (Liverani, 2002: 42). The last of these, in Liverani’s opinion, is a distinct development of the Iron Age, where the adaptation of state administrative structures to tribal social ideologies makes kinship and descent, rather than territory, (at least metaphorically) the basis of citizenship and the extended family the model for political community. While Buccellati relied heavily on the biblical narrative to establish the sequence of development for his national states, Liverani looks more widely in reconstructing the emergence of Iron Age ethnic states. In particular, Liverani points to the apparent existence of Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age tribal leagues/chiefdoms formed on the peripheries of the “Great Kingdoms” under military pressure (Liverani, 2002: 38-41). This includes the Kashka north of Hatti, the Lullu of the Zagros, and the tribal coalitions of eastern Libya.

Alexander Joffe also uses the term “ethnic state” to describe Iron Age kingdoms in the southern Levant. He argues that these kingdoms are distinguished from city-states by the use of shared identity to facilitate social and political integration (Joffe, 2002). Like Buccellati and Liverani, he accepts that these identities were grounded in kinship and “tribalism” with roots in the disruption and dislocation that followed on the end of the Late Bronze Age city-state system. However, Joffe differs in arguing that coherent ethnic integration followed on, rather than preceded state-formation, beginning as a leadership strategy of emergent elites and dating primarily from the ninth century BCE and later.

Different as well is the use of “tribal kingdom” amongst scholars working in Transjordan (Bienkowski, 2009; Bienkowski and van der Steen, 2001, Knauf, 1992; LaBianca and Younker, 1995), where the Iron Age kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom are frequently portrayed as continuations, rather than transformations, of pre-existing tribal groupings. E.A. Knauf, for example, characterizes these Transjordanian states as a “thin veneer of central administration” (Knauf, 1992: 52). In all of this literature, flexible metaphors of kinship and genealogy are seen as the real foundations of political life, and these are held to be constant in principle over very long periods of time. Hence, there is little emphasis in the Transjordanian literature on an epochal difference between Bronze and Iron Age social forms, nor are claims made for a transition from tribe to *ethnos* as was argued by Buccellati and Liverani.

### ***Patrimonial kingdoms***

An alternative characterization of Iron Age kingdoms has been provided by scholars making use of Max Weber’s patrimonial mode of legitimate political domination, where political relationships are modeled on those of the household. Niels Peter Lemche terms this a patronage society to distinguish its *Mafioso*-style relationships from the impersonal, bureaucratic relations that he feels are the only ones properly associated with the State (Lemche, 1995, 1996). Lemche’s model has been developed much more extensively by Emanuel Pfoh, most particularly in terms of “classic” themes from Mediterranean ethnography (e.g. patron/client; honour/shame etc.) (Pfoh, 2009a, 2009b, 2013, 2016). Pfoh uses the model of a “patronage society” both as a critique of traditional



approaches to state formation in ancient Israel and as an historiographic tool to interpret a wide range of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern evidence (Pfoh, 2009a: 120-160; 2013).

Lawrence Stager and his students follow the terminology of Weber more closely, writing of patrimonial states in which the metaphor of the kingdom as the household of the king, incorporates the populace as a series of nested households (see Master, 2001; Schloen, 2001; Stager, 2003; see Pfoh, 2016: 138-149 for an explicit fusion of these related approaches). Distinct from those who characterize “tribal” or “ethnic” states as an Iron Age innovation, advocates of patrimonialism tend to emphasize continuity between Bronze and Iron Age political forms seeing all ancient Near Eastern polities as variations on a single patrimonial theme (see Lemche, 1996; Pfoh, 2013; Schloen, 2001). Distinct from the Transjordanian “tribal kingdom” literature, which also posits Bronze and Iron Age continuity, patrimonialism can be realized through political hierarchy and is not necessarily expressed via genealogically integrated groups (i.e. tribes).

## Critical Considerations

To a large extent, the model of internal ethnic homogeneity in Iron Age kingdoms is derived from the Hebrew Bible. Extra-biblical evidence, frequently cited as further evidence for the “tribal” or “ethnic” nature of Iron Age kingdoms (e.g. the use of “house” [*bît/bêṭ*] in Assyrian and Aramaean inscriptions), complicates, rather than confirms, this picture. Despite the occasional effort to argue otherwise (Grosby, 1995), Aramaean speakers were fragmented into numerous kingdoms with little evidence that this linguistic identity served a political or integrative role (Sader, 1987). Indeed, despite their apparently tribal origins, individual Aramaean states exhibit a variety of associative principles. Certainly, both Liverani and Joffe are required to exclude the Aramaean states from their “ethnic state” category, with no clear justification for why this should be a distinctively Southern Levantine phenomenon. Even within the Southern Levant, the kingdom of Moab is simply assumed to be “tribal” or “ethnic”, even though Moab itself seems to be a geographical term and the primary metaphor used in the primary indigenous Moabite source (the Mesha Inscription) is land (*eretz*) rather than genealogy (Routledge, 2004: 147-148). This is not to argue that metaphors of kinship and genealogy were not politically important in Iron Age Moab, but to point out that our extent evidence is quite a bit more diverse than these local typologies allow.

Interestingly, by positing both the formation of Iron Age kingdoms and the absence of significant social structural change, the Transjordanian tribal kingdom model creates an historical problem relevant to all of these local typologies. How do we get kingdoms if nothing changes? In my own work on Iron Age Moab (Routledge, 2000, 2004), I attempted to address this issue by shifting the focus from social structural types, such as tribes and states, to questions of how political authority is formed and asserted. In particular, I argued that in the Mesha Inscription, Mesha uses a segmentary logic of contrast and incorporation to construct the “Land of Moab” as a viable political entity over which Mesha could

rule (Routledge, 2004: 143-153). By standing in contrast to Israel as its peer, the Land of Moab could incorporate other existing political affiliations (e.g. “the Land of Ataroth”) without superseding them. While I treated segmentation as something of a structuring *mentalité*, Benjamin Porter examined the formation of the kingdom of Edom by focusing much more directly on specific material strategies of incorporation, such as sedentarization, the redistribution of prestige goods, the promotion of a ‘national’ cult of Qos, royal building projects at Busayra and territorial expansion into the Negev (Porter, 2004).

For Piotr Bienkowski both of these studies ascribe a misplaced centrality and hierarchy to Moab and Edom (Bienkowski, 2009). Bienkowski argues that the decentralized nature of the Edom and Moab across a number of spheres shows that these kingdoms existed within a social framework defined by tribalism. Tribal kingdoms were composed of “...largely independent groupings held together by bonds of co-operation and allegiance to a supra-tribal monarchy at so-called ‘capitals’...” (2009: 9). Importantly, Bienkowski argues that within these tribal kingdoms local kin affiliations (i.e. tribes) were the only political identities that were recognised and that these kingdoms were not socially or economically transformative (2009: 12). Instead, the “thin veneer of central administration” was short-lived and limited in influence, existing in specific contingent circumstances and disappearing without a trace once those circumstances changed (2009: 14).

Bienkowski (2009: 12) is correct to question my suggestion that the Mesha Inscription constructs Moab as a “...workable and independent national identity” (Routledge, 2004: 150) insofar as this implies that it was based on some form of personal affiliation akin to modern nationalism. This was never my intent. Rather, I was arguing that, as a text, the Mesha Inscription was engaged in polity defining discourse, asserting that the Land of Moab was something over which a king could rule. Elsewhere I have enumerated specific examples in the Mesha Inscription where Mesha explicitly asserts his authority over the Land of Moab (Routledge, 2016). I also point to archaeological evidence that might indicate that militarism, and especially security (e.g. fort construction), is an area where royal initiatives (within the context of the Assyrian Empire) may have catalysed the clear changes in settlement patterns and economic activity evident in the later Iron Age of Moab. For present purposes, it is enough to note that even if Bienkowski were completely correct we are still left with the historical problem of how and why this “thin veneer of central administration” was asserted and represented as it was under “particular contingent circumstances” (Bienkowski, 2009: 14).

In an extended critique of Porter, Juan Manuel Tebes seems to recognize the problem of the undefined “kingdom” portion of the “tribal kingdom” model (Porter, 2004; Tebes, 2016: 114). Tebes strongly asserts the mutual exclusivity of social structural types such as tribe and state. In the absence of a Weberian centralized decision-making body with a monopoly on force, Edom can only be a tribal coalition or chiefdom. Even this, however, is too centralized for Tebes if applied to all of Edom. Hence, for Tebes, the “kingdom” of Edom was a chiefdom limited to the immediate vicinity of Busayra, one that did not structurally encompass the wider network of local tribes in southern Transjordan (Tebes,

2016: 118). This leads Tebes into an interesting discussion of the terminology of kingship, both as a title adopted by the chiefs of Busayra and ascribed to them by both Neo-Assyrian and Judahite editors of the Hebrew Bible. The diversity of what the term king (*mlk/ šarru*) might refer to in the Iron Age is part of the point of my discussion. However, by distinguishing Edom as the Busayra chiefdom from Judah as a petty state (Tebes, 2016: 119), the question of how we should compare Transjordanian “tribal kingdoms” to the many other contemporary Iron Age kingdoms that also appear to make use of kinship and genealogy in their political self-representation is brought to the fore. From a Levantine perspective, kinship-based terminology such as “House of X” or “Sons of X” is too widespread to distinguish between the social structure of Iron Age polities in any typological sense. As such kinship-based terminology cannot be used as evidence for the tribal nature of individual Levantine Iron Age polities unless all such polities are to be considered “tribal kingdoms” despite their organizational differences.

Similar problems arise for the “patrimonial state” if it is treated as a structural model that realizes a given mentality, rather than as a means of analyzing specific political relationships. For example, both the house and patrimonial language provide strong political metaphors in a range of Syro-Anatolian inscriptions (whether Luwian, Phoenician or Aramaic). In the Luwian funerary inscription Kululu 4 (Payne, 2012: 50-52) the Tabalean ruler Ruwas states that he “...was every man’s father”. In the Çineköy bilingual inscription (Luwian/Phoenician) (Payne, 2012: 42-44), Warikas, king of Hiyawa/ Adana expresses submission to the Assyrian Empire in terms of the uniting of two houses in which the house of Assyria becomes both father and mother to him (Lanfranchi, 2009). Similarly, patronage, if not outright nested patrimonial households, might give conceptual order to the complex network of subordination and clientship between kings/“country lords”/ governors attested in Luwian royal inscriptions (Hawkins, 1995; Ponchia, 2011). Archaeologically, without invoking patrimonialism or patronage directly, James Osborne has shown that settlement patterns in the ‘Amuq, as well as some inscriptions, favour viewing the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Patina as spatially discontinuous (Osborne, 2013). He suggests that royal sovereignty was not dependent on territorial incorporation; hence one might posit that it was based on dyadic relations of patronage (although Osborne does not go this far).

At the same time, Syro-Anatolian royal inscriptions (esp. those in Luwian) often put rather narrow emphasis on the royal house, distinguishing it carefully from those being ruled. For example, the two bilingual inscriptions from the kingdom of Hiyawa/Adana (Karatepe I and Çineköy) refer collectively to the kingdom by referencing its chief city (Adana), using geographical terms (Hiyawa/ the plain of Adana) and by means of gentilics (Adaneans/ Hiyaweans). At the same time, the royal house is distinguished as the house of Muksas/ Mopsos, which depending upon one’s interpretation of this ancestral name, may be a self-conscious assertion of the foreignness of the ruling dynasty (see Bryce, 2016; Gander, 2012; and Yakubovich, 2015).

While the personal genealogies of kings are important in Syro-Anatolian royal inscriptions, the relationship between specific kings and their polities seems fraught when it comes to questions of inheritance, succession and origin. The

reuse and referencing of old reliefs seems important to legitimizing individual rulers (Hermann, 2017), even as the erasure of monuments (Osborne, 2017) and the disparagement of the achievements of past rulers (even those in one's own lineage) are both relatively commonly attested. In other words, the language of political relations cannot so easily subsume the historical realities of political relations. Indeed if, as David Schloen argues (Schloen, 2001), all Near Eastern societies are simply distinct historical realizations of a common patrimonial mentality that exists along a continuum of greater and lesser centralization, then this model has little to tell us about either political centralization itself or the diversity we find within Iron Age polities.

Local typologies, like their universal counterparts, create two sorts of problems in terms of understanding specific historical processes and contexts. First, they provide no means for dealing with diversity within categories. Second, they tend to shape the interpretation of data, rather than be tested by it. This is especially true in cases where evidence is rare and fragmentary, creating the temptation to use type descriptions or model parameters to fill in gaps in our knowledge. The result is a tendency to homogenize the nature of polities within categories and exaggerate the differences between polities in different categories.

Rather than devising ever more intricate typologies, we should consider the benefits of seeing Iron Age state-formation from a Levantine perspective. Being globally interconnected, communities across the Levant experienced the domino effect of competition as populations shifted in their distribution, established "Great Kingdoms" collapsed or withdrew, established modes of resource acquisition broke down and formerly minor powers attempted to expand into, what was effectively, a power vacuum. These circumstances created pressures towards militarization and resource centralization in at least a relative sense. In such circumstances, if power and force are to be centralized and reproduced they also need to be domesticated and stabilized. This requires the construction of hegemonic moral orders that legitimize and normalize new relations of power. At the same time, being locally diverse, such hegemonic orders in the Levant had to be constructed from the cultural resources on hand in specific spatial and historical contexts. Genealogy, kinship, identity, piety, patronage, and military success were all cultural resources valued, familiar and hence available for reinterpretation in the interests of royal hegemony. These were strategic, rather than structural, properties of Iron Age state-formation; which was itself a work of *bricolage* rather than the unfolding of a process inherent in preexisting social patterns. Different kingdoms took somewhat different forms depending on the specific historical circumstances under which dynasts were able to stabilize given configurations of power.

## Conclusion

In the case of both local Aegean style pottery and the formation of Iron Age kingdoms, a Levantine perspective challenges common assumptions and generalizations. When we pay attention to Levant-wide processes and shared historical circumstances, it becomes very difficult to justify particularist perspectives

concerned only with a single cultural group, or the territory defined by a single modern state. At the same time, taking the Levant seriously as a research frame also forces us to account for its diversity and question any easy global typologies or singular stories. Yes, the Levant is a problematic term, referring to a vaguely defined territory. However, it is also a frame of mind and an orientation to research questions that, at least in the case of Iron Age archaeology as it exists today, holds the promise of productive new work and a more hopeful future.

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